By
Chief Mike Mountain Horse

CHARCOAL

It was haying time on the Blood Reserve in the year 1896. Contracts called for large amounts of hay to be delivered by the Indians to any of the following points: Main Agency on the Macleod Post, D. Division Headquarters, and Lethbridge K. Division of Hillspring on the southern border of the Blood Reserve. This special haying camp was under the supervision of Cliff Clark, farm instructor of the Reserve at that time, and Charcoal was one of those working on this camp.

One morning Charcoal asked his wife to accompany him and assist in the hay field. "I am not well this morning. I don't want to go," Pretty Kangaroo Woman replied, and was accordingly excused by her husband.

Charcoal came home from his work unexpectedly that day and found his wife entertaining in a fashion too hospitable even for an Indian hostess a young brave who was one of her distant relatives. Charcoal admonished his wife's paramour in somewhat the following words:

"Young man, listen to me. My wife is your relative. Discontinue these meetings, and don't gossip. This will be a secret (between) the three of us. I have no inclination to let people know that I discovered you two -- they would have a very poor opinion of me., if they knew. So I will do nothing further."

The illicit lovers, however, were very enamoured of each other, and refused to heed this warning. The young brave again had the temerity to intrude on Charcoal's household, to be again discovered.

No second warning was issued by the wronged husband. The Indian prides himself on his stoicism and ability to conceal his emotions at all times. Thus Charcoal managed to hide his feelings.

One morning, shortly after the second episode, Charcoal again requested his wife to accompany him to the fields. "Come with me and tramp the hay down in the rack as I pitch it up," he said.

"I have a severe headache," his wife replied. "I do not think I can go."

With his suspicions aroused, Charcoal went to his labors alone, and hitching his team to his mower, commenced cutting hay. About a quarter of a mile away he observed the rival for his wife's affections engaged in the task of raking hay. He kept an eagle eye on him and his suspicions were augmented when the watched one made a sudden disappearance.

The suspence was too great for Charcoal to bear. He had arrived at the extremity of his endurance, his pride wasstabbed with murderous hate, who shall say that this condition, under similar circumstances, could have existed only in an Indian's breast?

Believing that the young man was once more visiting his wife, he decided that he would definitely and finally ascertain just what was going on. To unhitch his team and make his way home was but the work of a few minutes. On his arrival at his teepee he was informed that his wife had repaired to the river bottom to fetch wood. With still greater ire and healously -- for he remembered the "severe headache" of the morning -- Charcoal armed himself with a rifle and rode to the river bottom. In a clearing by the bushes he spied his wife's horse grazing about unattended. Further on was another horse

bridled with a harness bridle, also grazing unattended. Proceeding through the surrounding brush in search of his wife, his face contorted with vicious purpose, Charcoal came to a half-built log stable. Peering through the apertures between the logs, he discovered his wife in sinful tryst with her lover. Without any preamble, Charcoal shot through the chinks of the log structure at the invader of his domestic felicity. Severely wounded in the head, one of his eyeballs hanging from its socket, the young man sprang with the swiftness of a rattler to attach Charcoal. Fighting like maniacs, alternately beating each other down, falling under and rising again to deliver savage blows, the fight continued. The younger had the advantage of youth and strength, but this was more than offset by his terrible wound, and Charcoal, spurred on by mad fury, finally managed to beat his adversary into complete insensibility, when he was left for dead.

Next morning, two women meeting at the scene of the late conflict, heard moans coming from the log structure and their investigation disclosed a man lying on the ground inside. "Tell my brother to come for me," he said. "I am wounded. Charcoal is the man who shot me."

But the message as given was never delivered, for Charcoal, either hearing or surmising that his work was incomplete, returned and finally dispatched his enemy.

Police patrols and Indians, visiting the scene of the conflict later found signs of a bloody struggle. Their visit took place following the discovery of the corpse by an Indian catching horses in close proximity to the log stable, and his reporting his gruesome find. It was decided by the police that this was a clear case of first degree

murder and immediate steps were taken to apprehend the killer.

Strangely enough, Charcoal did not fall under suspicion during the early part of the investigation. Another Indian, Eagle Shoe, who it was discovered, had had a quarrel with the slain man, was the first to be suspected. Charcola, however, anticipating discovery sooner or later, and apparently giving way to desperation, was the first to strike. Making a nocturnal visit to the home of Mr. McNeil, a former employee on the Reserve, he shot through a window, wounding McNeil in the side. Only the deflection of the bullet by a flower pot at the time of shooting, and the later administrations of Mr. Robert Wilson, whose rudimentary knowledge of surgery enabled him to cleanse and dress the wound, saved McNeil's life. But this was only one of the many visits and escapades made by Charcoal from his hiding places in the days following his flight from justice.

For instead of appearing before the police and attempting to vindicate his action, or going to the Indian Agent and letting him hear his story, Charcoal had sought refuge in flight. Six persons accompanied him, his two wives -- Pretty Kangaroo Woman nad Sleeping Woman -- one of his wives' mother, his grown daughter, and two boys.

Pitching their tent in close proximity to Chief Mountain, Charcoal made many nightly excursions to the surrounding country in quest of food and other commodities. Once he visited the Mounted Police detachment at Cardston and appropriated some of the officers' equipment -- I believe it was Inspector Davidson's.. On this occasion he was surprised duing his raid and took cover behind a watering trough, where Sergeant Armour (since retured on pension) approached, a lantern in hand, to water his horse. Charcoal fired at the officer, grazing him, and the sergeant promptly retreated to a less valorous,

but much safer, position.

One morning, in a frenzy of despair, Charcoal walked to the top of a hill near his teepee, and gazing out over the Belly Buttes, the scene of his boyhood days, he sang his battle song. Then, thinking of his friends, old associates, old customs, and his life prior to his becoming a fugitive, he wept aloud, his family witnessing his anguish. What terrible suffering, what torture his soul must have undergone, what a cross he bore, as he looked down at the territory where he had always known liberty, respect, and never fear. These tribulations will never be appreciated by either myself or the reader, who has not thoroughly known the red man's wandering and free existence and his comparatively happy life on the Blood Reserve.

On his return to his tent, his daughter, seeing the tear stains on his face, wept also. "My father," she sobbed, "I wish that I might kill her," indicating her step-mother, the faithless wife of Charcoal. "She is the cause of all our misfortune. You have been a good husband to her, but she has never appreciated your kindness. Let me kill her."

Be it to Charcoal's credit that, even in his extremity, he would not listen to such talk. "My child," he said, "you must not talk so. I know what is going to happen to me. But you are still young. Yo must go on with your life."

Now snow had begun to fly, which ma de tracking a great deal easier, and police patrols and Indians trailing the refugees discovered the exact whereabouts of Charcoal's camp, noting the smoke from his fire. A depot was established by the pursuers. Men were left to care for the horses, and the main company went a tedious journey on foot

through the timber, reaching the fugitive's camp at break of day. Chief Scout Green Grass warned both police and Indians not to shoot until the teepee was surrounded, when a general attack was to be made at a given signal. No sooner had these instructions been given than Charcoal came forth from his teepee, his rifle in one hand, the other shading his eyes as he carefully scanned the wooded area that lay before him. Always on the alert, and scenting human presence, he stepped back into his lodge. The attackers concentrated a barrage of shots on the top of the dwelling and then, from the front, rushed their objective. They found that Charcoal, his two wives, and one of the boys, had escaped by a back way. The mother-in-law, the girl, and the other boy were caught and taken into custody.

Reports as to Charcoal's flight from this time on vary, but his depleted family party made their way back to the Blood Reserve, where they stole two horses -- presumably police mounts -- which were subsequently found by the Peigan Indians at the river bottom, where the town of Brocket now stands.

Meanwhile, Charcoal continued to the timber right of the Peigan Indians at the Porcupine Hills, and from this place of refuge made many stealthy trips to their Reserve for food. On the occasion when he left his camp, he tied each of his wives to widely separated trees, being suspicious, and rightly so, that they were only too ready to effect their escape.

One night when raiding the Peigan encampment for the purpose of procuring a fresh mount, he was surprised during his selection of a horse by a resident brave, Coming Door, who asked "What are you doing? Are you Charcoal?" For reply Charcoal fired at his discoverer but without registering a hit. The fire was returned but Charcoal also escaped

unscathed, and by the time Coming Door and his friends had organized a pursuit party, darkness concealed the trail.

On a later nocturnal visit to the Peigan Reserve, his destination was the Old Agency, and Charcoal's small son accompanied him. Leaving the boy at the river bank with instructions to wait for him, Charcoal rode across the river. On the way he met two boys coming from the old Agency, but having drawn up the hood which was attached to his blanket cloth, they did not recognize him. In his own words, as he related the experiences of that night to other Indian prisoners in the Macleod guard room at a later date, "I went up to a hand game that was being played in a teepee and stood among a crowd of boys. No one recognized me. I looked into the teepee and saw a Kootney Indian sitting there. I got ready to shoot him but remembered I had left the boy on the opposite bank of the river. This prevented me from firing."

When Charcoal returned to the place where he had left the boy, he found that he had escaped, or been captured. What had actually occurred was that the boy had gone to the home of Woodman, a Peigan Indian, who took him to the Mounted Police detachment located about a mile away. Police, interrogating the boy that night, were informed of the whereabouts of Charcoal's haunts in the Porcupine Hills.

Next morning, in company with Mounted Police and Indians, the boy directed the officers to his father's place of hiding. In the interim, the refugee had not been idle. Anticipating that the boy might bring the police to his camp, he moved his location northward about a mile, and watching his previous site, saw the horses approaching it. "There is my son guiding the police to where we camped," he called to his wives. Thus, once more, he was able to evade his pursuers.

As previously mentioned, whenever Charcoal left his hiding place in

quest of food, he invariably tied his wome to trees, far apart. One morning he omitted part of this procedure insofar as he only tied their hands being their vacks, their legs together, then left them, some distance apart, on the ground. Before taking his leave he informed Pretty Kangaroo Woman that he had decided to kill her when he returned. Sleeping Woman observed his departure and when he was some distance away cried to her sister in distress, "How has he tied you?" On being told, she suggested that they roll toward each other. This they did, with great difficulty, after which they contrived to loosen their bonds. Sleeping Woman first releasing Pretty Kangaroo Woman's hands by using her teeth on the cords, and Pretty Kangaroo then releasing her. The women had barely gained the protection of the encircling wood when Charcoal returned and discovered their escape. Going to the edge of the brush he called them, and while one expressed a desire to return, the other exhorted her not to do so! The two then made their way to the Blood Reserve and after days of hardship arrived there with terribly lacerated feet. They were made captive by Rides-at-Door, a Blood Indian, who handed them over to his Chief and the Indian Agent, who in turn committed them to the care of the Mounties.

And now the case narrowed down to the pursuit of a lone fugitive. One night, with more snow on the ground, Charcoal rode forth on a food-hunting expedition, choosing as a likely destination some Indian camps and houses on the north side of the river, just east of the Peigan Agency Knocking on the door of Jack Spear's house, he cried, "Whose house is this?" There were numerous Indians in the house, gambling, but no one answered his call, for all were aware of his reputation of shooting on sight. Instead, they busied themselves trying to get under cover, Some leaped behind the bi cast-iron stove, others utilized an all-

too-small table, and one generousl proportioned elderly lady, tipping the scale at approximately 300 pounds, attempted vainly to do a disappearing act into the sideboard. Finally, one fellow, more intrepid than the others, ventured to answer Charcoal's question.

"Where does my friend Running Crow live?" came the second query.

"At the next house," came the reply, and the hiding places disgorged their relieved occupants as Charcoal road off in the direction indicated.

On arrival at Running Crow's house, Charcoal, still sitting his horse called out requesting that food and necessary commodities be given him. But Running Crow decided to prepare a trap for him. Stationing himself behind the stove, armed with a rifle, and his two wives, armed with axes, on either side of the door, he invited Charcoal to dismount and enter. Again the fugitive's sense of impending danger warned him, and taking a short cut, he jumped his mount over an old root cellar and fled. Immediately after, two Mounted Police arrived at the camp from the opposite direction and were informed that Charcoal had just left. Pursuit was delayed, however, until the following morning, when eight Indians took up the easily followed trail in the snow, and at the same time, Big Face Chief, Peigan Indian, was dispatched to Pincher Creek to inform police there of the discovery and direction of the flight of the wanted man.

Charcoal struck south, coming to a farm house into which he broke and stole some food. His trailers came upon him, in the act of making a fire, in the vicinity of Chipman's Creek. On sighting the posse, Charcoal remounted and galloped off, his desperation now seeming to change to a hysterical joy of combat, for as he rode he sang his

battle song, and the Peigans followed in hot pursuit. Many Chiefs (now one of the Councillors of the Peigan Indians) shouted to him, "Come back, my friend, No harm is coming to you!" Charcoal pulled up and looked back. But his momentary confidence was dispelled when Coming-Door, another of the trailers, screamed at him, "Charcoal, you are now going to find out that it does not pay to be foolish!" On hearing these bitter words the fugitive galloped off again.

Jack Spear, riding a gray horse, fastest and hardest of the mounts of all the Peigans, closed in on the fleeing criminal. Charcoal merely turned and looked at him, and the look alone sufficed to make Spear draw up and retreat to a greater distance. Twice the gray drew near Charcoal, and twice Spear hauled into a retreat on Charcoal's turning in his seat to glare at the pursuer, though the glare turned to derisive mirth as the retreats were made.

Tail Feathers, noted scout of the N.W.M.P., requested Spear to trade mounts with him. John Holloway, interpreter for the Police, made the same request, but both were ignored by Spear, even though he well knew that their horses were exhausted and could not gain on the pursued. And to this day that gray horse of Jack Spear's is spoken of as "Runaway Gray" by the Peigan Indians. Some of the posse whose mounts were played out by the long race, held on the tails of the horses of the other scouts in order to keep in the running.

At this stage of the pursuit Charcoal turned and addressing the Indians begged them to keep away as he was not on the offensive against his own people. But Sergeant Wild had just arrived from Pitcher (?) Creek with a fresh horse, and riding hard rapidly overhauled Charcoal. I am not criticizing the action of this intrepid young officer when he

chose not a suicidal course to rid me of the last link of the elusive one, but I believe better judgment could have been employed. As he came available, the sergeant hunted at Burrell, using [illegible] name and otherwise to raise hell of the Sterling Nation. Price Burrell continued his way, then, that he by that the officer could not be discarded, he [illegible] while, rode [illegible] hill fifteen on, then came back and circled around the fallen figure, [illegible] his own song. He then shot the body again, took the horse and ammunition of the vanquished, and continued his flight, at the same time, in his frenzy, muttering the Indians to follow on, for his terrible deed had held them in their tracks.

But the report of the events were entirely played out by now, and to follow Burrell, mounted on fresh horse, was out of the question. Scout Tail Feathers, [illegible] at seeing his superior shot down, mounted the horse Burrell had left, and kept on his trail. The others took the body of Sergeant Tate and conveyed it to the farmhouse of John Digstone, a Freedman who lived nearby, where it was transported to Fletcher Creek.

Many and varied are the reports that have been circulated as to the final capture of Burrell, but I believe the following is the first disclosure of the actual facts of the event.

To his last [illegible] Burrell, as hours seemed inevitable, rode back to the Blood Reserve, to the home of his brother, Left Hand, who had previously promised the police that he would aid in effecting a capture. Knocking at the door, the fugitive asked that it be opened and that he be given food. Left Hand, recognizing his brother's voice, quietly directed his wife to comply in the request, then, raising his voice, invited Burrell in. After feeding him and giving

his stroke, doubtless thus averting suspicion, one of Left Hand's wives, a woman weighing nearly 300 pounds, sprang upon Charcoal, at a signal from her husband, and bore him to the floor. With Left Hand's help the captive was held down till the other wife had summoned other Indians, who came and tied him fast. He was then placed in a bed, and word of his capture was carried to the police. In the interval he attempted suicide by pricking an artery with a nail, but his act was detected in time to prevent his bleeding to death. The police came and took the prisoner away to Medicine Hat, where he was subsequently convicted of the murder of Sergeant Wild and executed on the scaffold there on February 10th, 1897.

For his part in effecting the capture of Charcoal, Left Hand was officially awarded a Chieftainship by the Department of Indian Affairs, but the Indians themselves never recognized his authority. In fact, they all adopted a particularly belligerent attitude toward him, believing his act to be unbrotherly in the extreme. After the execution of Charcoal, a large number of the Red Men congregated at the Catholic Mission to pay their last respects. Following the ceremony, Tembler, a childhood friend of the deceased, approached Left Hand, and after hurling at him all the vile epithets he could think of, proceeded to thrash him thoroughly with his whip. Others about were to repeat the punishment but were stopped by timely interference on.

Thus ends the story of Charcoal, a brave man bent on protecting his honor, and through ignorance of the law becoming more and more involved in deeds of desperation. As to his capture, after reading other accounts regarding the stupendous bravery employed to subdue and capture this man, it seems to me the ludicrous climax previously referred to.

Charcoal

1895-1896

The one lone Indian trouble in the south was that of Charcoal, which has been written and told in prose and poetry a great many times -- always with a little touch of art -- but it is given here from the staid reports of the different Mounted Police Officers and private citizens who actually took part. Charcoal killed two men, shot two or three others, and frightened hundreds before he was finally caught and put in jail, the story of his pursuit and elusions and eventual capture being one of intense interest.

On October 12th Charcoal, alias Bad-Young Man, a Blood Indian, discovered that another red man named Medicine-Pipe-Stem had debauched his home, so he promptly and thoroughly killed Medicine-Pipe-Stem and went on a lone war-trail, his hand against every man's. Poor Charcoal, being but a simple savage, did not know that he might not be punished very severely for the deed that he had done, for he had been told that white men hung Indians who killed, and he was assured he had signed his death-warrant when he drew his rifle-sights down on his victim. Taking his family, four squaws and two children, he vanished in the hills, first shooting Indian Agent McNeil through the arm, and then leaving word that he would come back some time in the near future and kill both McNeil and Red Crow the chief of the tribe. Charcoal certainly ran amuck when he started. Thirty Indian scouts and all the Mounted Police in the district combed the country in search of their quarry, but failed to gain sight or sound of him excepting in one instance, when he stole an overcoat from a settler named Henderson, much to Mr. Henderson's indignation. A few days passed and the forces of law and order scoured the land, one band under Inspector Jarvis finally cornering the renegade red man and his family in a cluster of timber

in the hills. Charcoal met them with a shower of bullets, directed with such good aim that he almost hit Inspector Jarvis. Just why this should be considered good shooting the Police records do not say, but they assuredly mention that the red man "almost" his the inspector. After quite a while had passed, and the silence had lasted some time, the Police charged and captured the camp, two squaws and one child, Charcoal in the meantime slipping around with a couple of squaws and one child and stampeding the horses of the police, the animals being found later at Legrandeur's ranch, forty-five miles away.

Again Charcoal vanished, being heard of once when he shot at Piegan while endeavoring to secure another horse, and the police went to great lengths of coercion and persuasion to secure some trace of him. Charcoal's othee boy, the one who escaped with his father while Inspector Jarvis was capturing th camp in the hills, was arrested on the reserve, and he consented to lead the police to the spot where Charcoal's two squaws were camped in the Porcupine Hills -- after lengthy persuasions. Long Man and Red Horse, two half-brothers of Charcoal's, were arrested, but released after proving they knew nothing of the man, and then new tales began to drift in concerning the doings of the lone Blood whem the Police were endeavoring so hard to cut from his base of supplies. On the 25th of October the fugitive killed a steer belonging to Hatfield on the north fork of the Kootenay; on the 30th he stole a horse from a Blood Indian and went south.

A reign of terror seemed to exist, particularly among the tribesmen of Charcoal. Red Crow, who was a warrior and a chief, and who had adopted white men's ways to the extent of a house and furniture, eschewed a bed during the time the outlaw ranged, and slept nervously upon the floor, knowing that Charcoal knew the position of the bed and might shoot through the window and kill him if he slept on it. Red Crow also worried much over

over the possible fate of his son, who was attneding school at High River. White Calf, another Blood warrior who apparently had reason to dread Charcoal, took to sleeping in the loft at his home and pulling the ladder up after him.

About the end of October the Police made still further efforts to bring the nerve-racking strain of the chase to a close, arresting two of the fugitive's brothers, Bear's Backbone and Left Hand, with twenty-two relatives. These two heads of families, with all their wives and progeny, were taken to jail and told they must find Charcoal. Left Hand was turned loose with the information that the Police would hold his family as hostages, and that he must catch, or inform the Police where to catch Charcoal before the tenth of the month or he would rest in hail with the remainder of the family. Bear's Backbone was given his liberty with similar information, leaving his mother, wives and children in the hands of the police.

In the meantime Charcoal shot at and narrowly missed Corporal Armer at Cardston, taking a shot at him from behind a water-trough, and then heading up Lee's Creek to Lamb's Ranch, where he broke in and stole some food. On November 10th Constable Hatfield and five Indian scouts found his camp on Beaver Creek, and Hatfield sent two Piegans to Pincher Creek to warn Sergeant Wilde. The latter at once set out, with Constable Ambrose, Scout Holloway and the two Indians, Wilde telling his men to shoot the outlaw as soon as they got within good range. There was a slight snow on the ground and the party sighted Charcoal, riding one tired horse and leading a pack-horse, on the north fork of the Kootenay near Thibaudeau's Ranch, Wilde reiterating his orders about shooting, saying he wanted them to commence shooting when within range, and in no case to go nearer than fifty yards. Holloway rode to within one hundred and fifty yards of the fleeing Blood, dismounting to shoot, only to have his rifle miss fire. Charcoal

had increased his lead to a half mile by the time Holloway climbed back on his saddle, and the police horses were tired, so some of the pursuers dismounted and plodded ahead on foot, though Wilde pressed on and came up to to the Indian about fifty yards from where an unarmed rancher named Bratton was herding some cattle and saw the whole tragedy. The officer fired no shot, but rode fearlessly up until he was alongside the red man, reached over to seize him and was shot through the body, the bullet entering his right side and being found in his left gauntlet, Charcoal firing his rifle as it lay across his saddle. Wilde fell, tried to rise, tugging weakly at his revolver, whereupon the desperate brave rode back and shot him in the forehead, thus making sure of his work. Dismounting and leaving his own weary pony, he took Wilde's horse and carbine and pressed on, being out of sight when the other constables and scouts arrived. Bratton offered his horse to the up-coming persuers, but the only man who continued on the trail, an Indian named Many-Tail-Feathers-Around-His-Neck, refused it, saying the animal was too nervous and wild for him. Leaving the rest of the party with the slain constable, Many-Tail-Feathers-Around His-Neck, proceeded in pursuit, riding Charcoal's deserted steed. Next day the country was filled with Police, grimly determined to capture or kill the man who had slain one of their most popular brother-in-arms, and the hills and slopes were searched with a thoroughness which left nothing unseen. In the meantime Many-Tail-Feathers had followed Charcoal and come upon a party of ranchers composed of John Herron, Thibaudeau, Craig and Foster and thus reinforced hastened on, eventually seeing Charcoal standing in the neck of timber. The only member of the rancher's party who is reported as being armed was Herron, who had his revolver, but as Charcoal was two hundred yards away when seen, this weapon was of little use, especially so since the red man had a very serviceable rifle. Tail-Feathers shouted to Charcoal to surrender, and was answered by such a shower of bullets that

the entire party took up a less-exposed position a hundred yards further back, Herron keeping up a futile fire with his r volver. Darkness came, and with it went Charcoal, the ranchers taking his trail up again in the morning and pressing doggedly on toward the reserve, whither he was evidently heading.

Weak and spent, exhausted from sleepless nights and endless flights, Charcoal had about decided to hive up and kill himself, after one more visit to his reserve and his people. His family was his last thought, apparently, and he went to them, arriving long after dark at the house wh ere his brothers sat disconsolately thinking that the tenth of the month had passed and they and their families must remain in jail. Charcoal opened the door and looked in, but something seemed to warn him he should not remain for he turned and started back to his horse, but was overpowered by, two men, who leaped upon him as he turned to go. Taking their prisoner into the house they have him a smoke, and then noticed he was bleeding badly, stoically dripping to death from holes he had punched into the veins of his arms, with a moccasin-awl, so they plastered the wounds with flour, bound them up, and kept their prize alive for the Police, who arrived in the morning, the arrest being made on November 12th. With Charcoal chained to the floor in the Macleod guardhouse, and guarded by five Policemen, the body of unfortunate Sergeant Wilde was laid to rest with military honors, the Blood chiefs and scores of settlers following the body to the grave.

The following ranchers and settlers assisted the police in the pursuit: John Herron, G. J. B. Jones, G. B. Ryckman, A. R. Dempster, N. Nash, B. Bolster, F. McKenzie, W. Reed, M. D. Gray, Legrandeur, S. S. Fraser, Thibaudeau, Foster and Craig.